

Message Text

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70

ACTION NEA-13

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2006

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DACCA 0427

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PINS, BG

SUBJECT: MUJIB RIDES THROUGH THE STORM

SUMMARY: IN PAST MONTH, A SERIES OF EVENTS ILLUSTRATED APTLY THE LEVEL AND FORM OF DISCONTENT IN BANGLADESH AND MUJIB'S PARTIAL EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH HIS PROBLEMS. THESE EVENTS WERE THE RESIGNATION OF PRESIDENT CHOWDHURY DECEMBER 24, THE AWAMI LEAGUE'S POOR SHOWING IN LOCAL ELECTIONS, THE CHALLENGE OF THE USD (NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY), AND INCREASING POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE COUNTRY-SIDE. ADDED TO THESE DEVELOPMENTS WERE THE RUMORS OF CABINET RESIGNATIONS AND DISSENSION WITHIN THE AWAMI LEAGUE WHICH WAS TO HAVE SURFACED AT THE PARTY'S BIENNIAL CONFERENCE. THE UNIFYING FACTOR IN THESE SEPARATE DEVELOPMENTS HAS BEEN DISCONTENT WITH THE AWAMI LEAGUE REGIME. IN SUM, THEY REFLECT GROWING UNHAPPINESS IN MOST ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY, FROM THE ELITE CLASS OF PRESIDENT CHOWDHURY TO THE VILLAGE FARMER, AND OF POLITICAL GROUPS FROM THE AWAMI LEAGUE ITSELF TO THE LEFT EXTREMISTS. THOUGH UNDER PRESSURE, MUJIB HAS COMPROMISED SKILLFULLY AND HAS EMERGED FROM THE EVENTS OF THE PAST FOUR WEEKS IN CONTROL OF HIS PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT. HE IS STILL THE ONLY MAN THE VAST MAJORITY OF BENGALLEES BELIEVE

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CAN RULE THEIR TROUBLED LAND. HE REMAINS UNOPPOSED BY ANY SIGNI-

FICANT OPPOSITION GROUP. HOWEVER, UNLESS HE IS MORE SUCCESSFUL IN DEALING WITH THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CAUSES OF FERMENT, HE WILL FIND CONTINUING HIS BALANCING ACT MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT. END SUMMARY.

1. MANY BENGALLEES ARE CRITICAL AND SOME ENRAGED AT THE DIRECTION OF MUJIB'S RULE AND OF THE TROUBLED INTERNAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION. FEW, HOWEVER, INCLUDING THOSE WITHIN THE AWAMI LEAGUE HAVE THE POLITICAL STRENGTH TO DO MUCH ABOUT IT. CHOWDHURY'S RESIGNATION DECEMBER 24 WAS LARGELY SYMBOLIC OF THE DISCONTENT, BUT ITS EFFECT AS A CATALYST UPON OTHERS WAS BLUNTED BY THE FORMER PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO SERVE MUJIB AS A SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ABROAD. MOREOVER, CHOWDHURY'S PUBLICLY STATED CONCERNS WERE ESSENTIALLY CONSTITUTIONAL, SUCH AS THE CONTINUATION IN EFFECT OF PRESIDENT'S ORDERS WHICH SHORT-CIRCUIT BASIC CIVIL LIBERTIES-- CONCERNS WHICH ARE NOT MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUES HERE AS YET. EVENTS OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE CONFERENCE JANUARY 18-20 PROVED THAT THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT FOR DISSIDENT ELEMENTS WITHIN THE PARTY TO BREAK WITH MUJIB. MUJIB, AS EXPECTED, SURRENDERED THE PRESIDENCY OF THE PARTY ON THE GROUNDS THAT HE COULD NOT BE BOTH PM AND AN EFFECTIVE PARTY LEADER AND INSTALLED COMMERCE MINISTER IN HIS STEAD. THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT KAMARUZZAMAN IS A CONCESSION TO ANY ONE FACTION. ALTHOUGH HE IS A MODERATE, HE IS IDENTIFIED ESSENTIALLY WITH MUJIB, NOT WITH ANY CONTENTIOUS MINISTERS. BUT BY SELECTING AS VICE PRESIDENT THREE MEN WHO REPRESENT LEFT TO MODERATE VIEWS, MUJIB MAY HAVE BEEN MAKING A CONCILIATORY GESTURE TO THE PARTY'S VARIOUS FACTIONS. WHILE CABINET SHIFTS WILL OCCUR WHEN KAMARUZZAMAN RESIGNS HIS POST, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE CHANGES WILL BE AS WHOLESAL AS RUMORED. THERE IS NO PATTERN TO THE RESIGNATIONS SUGGESTED, WHICH RANGE FROM MODERATE MINISTERS TO SOME IDENTIFIED WITH THE LEFT. NOR, IN MOST INSTANCES, HAVE COGENT REASONS BEEN ADVANCED (OTHER THAN UNHAPPINESS OVER BEING STRIPPED OF SOME OF THEIR PORTFOLIOS) FOR MINISTERS SUCH AS TAJUDDIN OR NAZRUL ISLAM GIVING UP POWER AT THIS STAGE. NOTHING INDICATES THAT THEY HAVE ALTERNATE POLITICAL PLANS OR ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT OUTSIDE THE AWAMI LEAGUE.

2. MUJIB SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE APPARENT DEFEAT OF AWAMI LEAGUE SYMPATHIZERS IN THE NONPARTISAN LOCAL ELECTIONS. WHILE THERE IS NO ROSTER OF WINNERS BY AFFILIATION AND VOTING LARGELY TURNED ON LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES, PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES

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BY VARIOUS SOURCES GIVE THE AWAMI LEAGUE NO MORE THAN 40 PERCENT OF THE SEATS. PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE WERE THE RELIEF COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN, ALMOST ALL AWAMI LEAGUERS, RUNNING FOR UNION AND MUNICIPAL COUNCIL CHAIRMANSHIPS. MANY WERE DEFEATED ON THE ISSUE OF CORRUPTION AND REPLACED BY FORMERLY INFLUENTIAL AND RESPECTED COMMUNITY LEADERS AND NEWCOMERS PERCEIVED TO BE HONEST. SEVERAL OF THE NEW MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS HAVE STRONG MUSLIM LEAGUE BACK- GROUND OR ARE DECLARED SUPPORTERS OF BHASHANI. MUJIB, HOWEVER,

APPARENTLY HAS CHOSEN TO IGNORE THIS REPUDIATION OF HIS OFTEN HAND-PICKED RELIEF PEOPE; HE INFORMED EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT THE AWAMI LEAGUE HAD WON OVER 90 PERCENT OF THE CHAIRMANSHIPS. MUJIB MAY BE IN A POSITION TO IGNORE THE ELECTION RESULTS SINCE THE COUNCILS HAVE LITTLE POWER. BDG HAS NOT YET FINALLY DECIDED WHAT AUTHORITY TO DELEGATE TO THEM. IT IS UNLIKELY NOW, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL FOLLOW THROUGH ON CONTEMPLATED PLANS TO TRANSFER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTAL AUTHORITY TO THE COUNCILS AND TO MAKE THE LOCAL CIVIL SERVANTS SUBORDINATE TO THEM. NOR IS MUJIB LIKELY TO DECENTRALIZE CONTROL OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES. THUS, THE EXPRESSION OF THE VOTERS WILL NOT BE TRANSLATED INTO ANY MEANINGFUL SHIFT OF POLITICAL POWER. THE ELECTION HAS SERVED, ON THE OTHER HAND, TO EMBOLDEN THE JSD AND THE LEFT EXTREMISTS TO STEP UP THEIR DISRUPTIVE CAMPAIGNS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DACCA 0427

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

3. MUJIB IS CONCERNED ABOUT AND HAS REACTED MOST OPENLY TO THE ACTIVITIES OF HIS POLITICAL OPPOSITION: THE AGITATIONAL EFFORTS OF THE JSD, AND THE TERRORIST LEFT EXTREMISTS RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH OF THE POLITICAL MURDERS AND RAIDS UPON GOVERNMENT INSTALLATIONS SUCH AS POLICE STATIONS, WAREHOUSES, AND BANKS. TO THESE, MUJIB

HAS RESPONDED IN A FASHION REMINISCENT OF PAST PAKISTANI GOVERNMENTS--RELIANCE UPON RESTRICTIVE LAW AND UPON TRADITIONAL SECURITY FORCES. RATHER THAN RISK A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE JSD AND THE AWAMI LEAGUE ON JANUARY 20, MUJIB IMPOSED SECTION 144 BANNING ALL PUBLIC MEETINGS IN DACCA AND IN SELECTED OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AND TURNED OUT THE POLICE AND THE RAKKHI BAHINI TO GUARD MEETING PLACES.

4. TO DEAL WITH THE EXTREMISTS AND MISCREANTS IN GENERAL, MUJIB HAS BEEN RELYING UPON THE ARMY TO SUPERVISE COMBINED FORCES SWEEP OPERATIONS IN VARIOUS DISTRICTS. ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL, HE HAS CREATED A SPECIAL POLICE UNIT REPORTING DIRECTLY TO HIS OFFICE THAT HAS SCOPPED UP, IN ADDITION TO GENERAL MISCREANTS, ACTIVE OPPOSITION POLITICIANS. SEVERAL OF THOSE SEIZED REPORTEDLY HAVE CONFIDENTIAL

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NOT BEEN SEEN SINCE. FURTHERMORE, HE HAS APPOINTED AS HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE, NOT ONLY A VETERAN POLICEMAN BUT ONE WHO PURSUED HIS CAREER UNINTERRUPTED THROUGH THE PAKISTANI PERIOD. THESE MOVES ARE INDICATIVE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S NEED TO USE MORE EFFECTIVELY THE TRADITIONAL GOVERNMENT ORGANS OF CONTROL AND AUTHORITY.

5. IN SUM, MUJIB HAS SUCCESSFULLY NEUTRALIZED FOR THE PRESENT INTRAPARTY FEUDING AND DEPRIVED THE JSD OF THE STREETS FOR PROTEST. WHILE MOVING TO RELY MORE HEAVILY ON THE ESTABLISHED FORCES OF BUREAUCRACY AND SECURITY, HE HAS NOT FORGOTTEN HIS PARTY. ESSENTIALLY A MAN OF POWER POLITICS, HE KNOWS HE MUST MAINTAIN HIS POLITICAL BASE IN ADDITION TO MORE EFFECTIVELY MOBILIZING THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE. THE APPOINTMENT OF KAMARUZZAMAN AS PRESIDENT MAY BE A RESPONSE TO THE POOR LOCAL ELECTION SHOWING AND AN EFFORT TO RECAP THE DECLINING FORTUNES OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE UNDER THE FULL-TIME MINISTRATIONS OF SOMEONE WITH STATURE. HIS TREATMENT OF RESISTANCE DAY MAKES MORE FORMIDABLE JSD'S TASK OF MOBILIZING PUBLIC PRESSURE AGAINST THE REGIME. THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM REMAINS THE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE WHICH MUJIB HAS MOVED TO CONTAIN. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT BDG CAN STAMP OUT THE EXTREMISTS, AND PARADOXICALLY, IT MAY ALIENATE THE PEOPLE AND INCREASE SUPPORT FOR THE EXTREMISTS THROUGH INDISCRIMINATE ARRESTS. YET MUJIB HAS NO ALTERNATIVE AND AT LEAST HAS SHOWN THE SENSE TO ENTRUST THE PROBLEM OF EXTREMISTS TO THE PROFESSIONALS LARGELY, AND DOWNGRADING THE ROLE OF THE STRONG-ARMED RAKKHI BAHINI.

6. HOWEVER, MUJIB HAS NOT ADDRESSED HIMSELF SYSTEMATICALLY TO THE ECONOMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS UNDERLYING THE POLITICAL FERMENT. HE IS PERFORMING A BALANCING ACT THAT WILL BE INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN AS THE ECONOMIC GROUND SLIDES OUT FROM UNDER HIM. THE LIMIT OF THE PEOPLE'S TOLERANCE FOR CONTINUED HARDSHIP IS AN IMPONDERABLE THAT EVEN MUJIB, WITH PROBABLY THE BEST DEVELOPED BENGALEE POLITICAL INSTINCT OF ANYONE, CANNOT ASCERTAIN. UNLESS

HE MOVES TO CORRECT THE ROOT CAUSES OF UNREST IN THE COUNTRY RATHER THAN TREATING THE SYMPTOMS ON A SHIFTING, AD HOC BASIS, MUJIB MAY WELL BE FACED WITH A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE IN HIS LEADERSHIP THAT WILL WIPE OUT ALL PREVIOUS POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND ALIGNMENTS AND THROW THE COUNTRY INTO THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO ARE PERCEIVED TO BE ABLE TO RESTORE ORDER AND GUARANTEE MINIMAL SURVIVAL. MUJIB HAS SHOWN SIGNS OF LATE IN MOVING FROM THE HYPER-CONFIDENTIAL

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SENSITIVE PREOCCUPATION WITH PURELY POLITICAL PARTY ISSUES TO CONSOLIDATE HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF GOVERNMENT. HE NEEDS TO DO FAR MORE.
FULLER

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